

4. NESTLING OF COMMON INDIAN NIGHTJAR (*CAPRIMULGUS ASIATICUS*, LATHAM)

On 19th September 1966 at about 11.30 p.m., while searching for nocturnal vertebrates, I spotted a Common Indian Nightjar (*Caprimulgus asiaticus* Latham) sitting on the ground among pebbles in a dried up nullah at Shindewadi, Poona District. I approached the bird gradually keeping it within the powerful beam of a 6-celled head-light and managed to catch it by hand. The discovery of a slightly cracked egg underneath the bird explained the reluctance on its part to fly away from the spot on my approach. Disconcerted at having broken the egg by the impact of my hand, I picked it up and was pleasantly surprised to see a nestling emerge out of the cracked shell on to the palm of my hand. I brought both the nestling and the parent back to the laboratory and kept them in a perforated wooden box till morning when they were both preserved after I had written down a description of the nestling and had photographed it. The incubating parent turned out to be the male.

A hurried glance through my reference cards and Hume's (1890: 48-99) and Baker's (1934: 488-489) accounts of the nidification of this species revealed that the nestling of this species has not been described so far. A brief description follows.

The body of the freshly hatched nestling was covered throughout with fine nestling down, 8 mm. to 12 mm. in length, dark rufous brown dorsally and light rufous brown ventrally, without any dark spots/areas on head, wings or thighs comparable to those of *Caprimulgus e. unwini* (Ticehurst 1926: 374) and *Caprimulgus mahrattensis* (Ticehurst 1926: 375). The eyes were open. The iris was warm brown. The beak was hard, greyish in colour with a black tip. The legs and claws were wheatish grey in colour. The tip of the claws were hard. The serration or comb on the third toe could be faintly made out but was soft like the rest of the claw. The nestling could sit upright, emit a weak sound and gape for food just after emergence. It could also turn over when placed on its back. It weighed c. 6 grams.

The Common Indian Nightjar (*Caprimulgus asiaticus*, Latham) breeds commonly around Poona. I have seen its nests with eggs as early as the middle of March and with young as late as the end of September. The nest lacks any formal attempt at construction. One or two, generally two, eggs are laid on the ground amongst pebbles or vegetation in bare dried up nullahs, hill slopes or pasture or under tree or in a patch of scrub. The eggs are elongate ovals, creamish stone to salmon pink in colour with pale reddish brown to purplish brown markings (blotches, spots

and streaks etc.). On the average 21 eggs measured 26.2×19.5 mm. and weighed 5.9 grams.

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5. THE HOUSE CROW (*CORVUS SPLENDENS*, VIEILLOT) FEEDING ON THE INDIAN DESERT GERBIL (*MERIONES HURRIANAE*, JERDON)

A house crow (*Corvus splendens*) was observed on the grounds of the Central Arid Zone Research Institute (Jodhpur, Rajasthan) with a gerbil (*Meriones hurrianae*) in its beak. The crow dropped the gerbil which immediately ran off through the light ground cover. The crow, half flying and jumping, quickly caught it again and shook it several times before releasing it. The gerbil started to run off again so the crow scooped it up and flew across the road to a bare patch of ground. He shook the gerbil again and dropped it. This time because of the lack of cover and the unfamiliar territory, the crow had no trouble catching the gerbil as it started off again. This was repeated several times before the gerbil lay in place where it was dropped. The crow gave it a couple of pecks and then picked it up and flew to the top of a nearby power pole. From the slackness of the gerbil's body, it was at least unconscious if not dead. The crow then proceeded to hold it under its feet while it pecked the body apart.

The original observations indicated that the gerbil was in good condition but had apparently been caught by the crow when it was too far from its burrow. The sagacity of the crow in taking the gerbil to bare ground and its agility in recapturing it, indicates that these could be very efficient predators of gerbils if they would put their mind to the task. This is an addition to the list of avian predators of gerbils listed by Prakash (*Mammalia*, 26 (3) : 311-331, 1962).

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